Preparatory Committee for the 2015 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons

14 March 2014

Original: English

Third session
New York, 28 April-9 May 2014

Establishing a weapons-of-mass-destruction-free zone in the Middle East

Joint working paper submitted by the members of the Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Initiative (Australia, Canada, Chile, Germany, Japan, Mexico, Nigeria, the Netherlands, the Philippines, Poland, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates)

1. The political situation in the Middle East is one of the most volatile in the world. The existence of ossified problems and the lack of confidence among the countries of the region have brought about constant tensions throughout the decades.

2. There is a build-up of weapons of mass destruction in the region. Some States of the region are still not party to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention or the Chemical Weapons Convention. Also, some States of the region have yet to agree to place their nuclear activities under full scope safeguards by the International Atomic Energy Agency. Questions remain about the nuclear capabilities of some States. There is a considerable stockpile of chemical weapons, and some States may be engaged in biological warfare-related activities.

3. To make matters worse, chemical weapons have, in fact, been used in the region, in the cases of Iraq and recently Syria, which led to humanitarian tragedies. Although the decisions of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and Security Council resolution 2118 (2013) were adopted in September 2013, and Syria became a party to the Chemical Weapons Convention, the commitments by the Syrian authorities with regard to the elimination of the chemical weapons stockpile and production facilities are yet to be implemented despite a strict timetable set by the decision of the Executive Council of OPCW.

4. Weapons-of-mass-destruction-free zones should be established on the basis of arrangements freely arrived at among the States of the region concerned. They constitute an important intermediate step towards the ultimate goal, namely, complete disarmament. Given the seriousness and urgency of the situation, we are of the view that the Middle East is a priority region for the establishment of such a zone.

Please recycle

5. Few words can better explain the way forward than those of Queen Rania of Jordan, who said that "to achieve a lasting peace in the Middle East takes guts, not guns". Unfortunately, we note that, 40 years after the adoption of the first General Assembly resolution calling for the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East (resolution 3263 (XXIX)), the issue remains unresolved.

6. A number of other resolutions that have the same purpose as resolution 3263 (XXIX) have been adopted by consensus by the General Assembly since 1980. A number of Security Council resolutions have also endorsed the idea. Since 1991, International Atomic Energy Agency General Conferences have also annually adopted a resolution calling for the application of full-scope safeguards on all nuclear activities in the region as a necessary step for the establishment of such a zone.

7. At the 1995 Review and Extension Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, States parties agreed on a resolution on the Middle East. The resolution states that a future weapons-of-mass-destruction-free zone would commit parties not to possess, acquire, test, manufacture or use any nuclear, chemical and biological weapons as well as their delivery systems. The decision, adopted without a vote, to indefinitely extend the Non-Proliferation Treaty in 1995 was made possible through a negotiated package of texts that included the resolution on the Middle East as well as the decisions entitled "Strengthening the review process for the Treaty" and "Principles and objectives for nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament". The Final Document of the 2000 Review Conference (NPT/CONF.2000/28 (Parts I and II)) recalled and reaffirmed the 1995 resolution.

8. At the 2010 Review Conference, States parties agreed on a decision to make progress on this issue. The United States of America, the Russian Federation and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland committed to work together with the Secretary-General to convene a regional conference to discuss the issue in 2012. Subsequently, Finnish Ambassador Jaakko Laajava was appointed as Facilitator. Regrettably, however, an international conference on a weapons-of-mass-destruction-free zone in the Middle East that would have been attended by all countries of the region on the basis of arrangements freely arrived at was not convened in 2012.

9. All States of the Middle East should unite around the idea of rendering the region free of all weapons of mass destruction. Transforming the Middle East into a weapons-of-mass-destruction-free zone will be instrumental in reducing tensions and building confidence.

10. The Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Initiative firmly believes that the challenges that must be overcome to create a weapons-of-mass-destruction-free zone in the Middle East are difficult, but not insurmountable. If all countries of the region display the required political will and work in a spirit of cooperation, progress can be made.

11. We note the recent developments in the region that may improve the prospects for a weapons-of-mass-destruction-free zone conference. The Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Initiative hopes that this positive momentum can be maintained.

12. Patience is an important virtue when it comes to the Middle East. Nevertheless, we also need to be mindful that the challenge at hand is pressing and requires a prompt solution.

13. We welcome the discussions on a weapons-of-mass-destruction-free zone conference that took place in Glion, Switzerland, which we supported and closely followed. We believe that these meetings are significant occasions for the countries of the region to come together and discuss the prospect of a conference on a weapons-of-mass-destruction-free zone in the Middle East. The Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Initiative hopes that the consultation process will produce substantial outcomes that will facilitate the convening of the conference.

14. The members of the Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Initiative see the decision to postpone the conference as a missed opportunity, not a lost one. However, we are concerned that further delay or lack of tangible progress to convene a conference could have negative repercussions for the prospects for a successful 2015 Review Conference.

15. To this end, we, as the Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Initiative, recommend that:

- The international community continue to pay special attention to the ultimate goal of establishing the Middle East as a zone free from all weapons of mass destruction;
- Countries of the region work together to reach an agreement on the arrangements for the conference;
- The Conveners and the Facilitator continue their efforts in a constructive, flexible and forward-looking manner so as to ensure that the conference is convened at the earliest convenience;
- The Conveners, in consultation with the countries of the region, announce a new date for the postponed conference;
- Countries of the region continue to work constructively with the Facilitator, Ambassador Laajava, and his team;
- All interested States parties to the Non-Proliferation Treaty constructively assist the process to convene a conference;
- Countries of the region work to strengthen mutual understanding and cooperation.

16. The Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Initiative will continue to follow this issue and stands ready to provide any support that the Conveners and the Facilitator may require.